

Mobilizing Justice Community of Practice Workshops: Findings and Recommendations

David Simor | T2 Working Group
Nancy Smith Lea | T2 Working Group

BACKGROUND

Over the course of 2023, The Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT) hosted a series of five workshops, convening a Mobilizing Justice Community of Practice of community organizations working to support transport equity and increase modal choice. The goals of the workshops were to:

1. Improve our understanding of experiences of Canadians facing transport poverty and the current on-the-ground priorities, gaps, and community initiatives developed in response.
2. Build two-way communication between community organizations and Mobilizing Justice researchers and partners.
3. Provide value to participating community organizations and leaders.

The workshops were held on Fridays from 12:00pm EST – 1:15pm EST. Workshop dates were:

- February 10
- May 26
- July 14
- September 15
- November 17

Invitations to participate were sent to 293 community organizations identified in the [Catalogue of Canadian Initiatives Addressing Transport Poverty](#). 642 organizations, individuals, and Mobilizing Justice partners registered to attend across the five workshops.

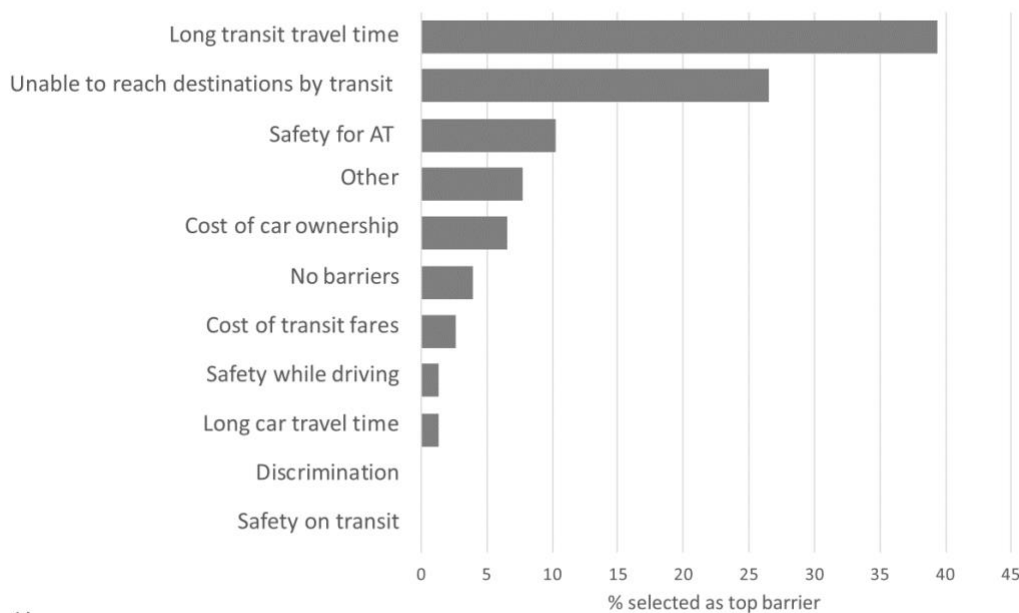
Held virtually over Zoom, each workshop featured presentations from Mobilizing Justice partners, Community of Practice organizations, or transportation practitioners. Workshops were organized around a key theme and topic, and featured some combination of large group discussions, formal presentations, smaller breakout sessions, interactive polls, and panel discussions.

WORKSHOP #1 – UNDERSTANDING ELECTED OFFICIALS: VALUES AND PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSPORTATION EQUITY (FEBRUARY 10)

The first workshop of 2023 shared findings from the Mobilizing Justice study that surveyed municipal and regional Councillors from across Canada on how they view key transportation issues. Mobilizing Justice Theme 3 co-lead Dr. Orly Linovski presented the findings from the survey, detailing how elected officials say they make decisions, how they prioritize transportation investments, their personal experiences with transportation barriers, and their support for transportation equity. Orly shared data on the services that surveyed elected officials feel their municipalities are successfully or not so successfully delivering. Orly noted that one of the services elected officials feel they are most successful at delivering is para-transit services. This was a surprise to several Community of Practice members who work specifically on issues related to public transit and accessibility. They feel most transit systems in Canada are failing people with disabilities, and that this is an area in which elected officials clearly need more education.

BARRIERS

What are the most significant transportation barriers people face in your jurisdiction?



14

Percentage selected as the top barrier to transportation faced by people in their jurisdiction by Elected Official survey respondents Fall 2022 (n=165)

Another key area of disconnect between the perceptions of elected officials and the lived experiences of the Community of Practice is around issues of discrimination. Not one surveyed elected official

listed discrimination as a top significant barrier people face in transportation in their jurisdiction. Less than 10% have personally experienced harassment or fear while travelling. In contrast, Community of Practice members have often discussed fear of racial and gender-based discrimination as a major barrier to mobility equity for themselves and their clients. Mobilizing Justice research on [A Review on the Implications of COVID-19 for Delivering Equitable Transportation](#) found data that illustrated the Community of Practice members' lived experiences to be true for many Canadians and illustrates another issue for which elected officials could be better informed.

WORKSHOP #2 – JUSTICE IN TRANSPORTATION: WHAT IS EQUITY AND HOW CAN IT BE USED IN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING? (MAY 26)

The second workshop featured a discussion on what exactly we mean when we ask 'is it just?' and 'what is equitable?'. Activity 2 co-lead Dr. Antonio Paez and Mobilizing Justice Transportation Equity Researcher Anastasia Soukhov shared initial findings from their [scan](#) of more than 1,000 studies that have referenced transportation equity, and then facilitated a conversation on common standards used for equity planning. Discussions started with seemingly simple questions such as 'is it fair that employees at Amazon work in hazardous conditions while Jeff Bezos travels to space?' but quickly moved to trickier questions like 'what is just transportation?' and 'how do we set standards that will move us towards justice?'

How would *you* make this situation more fair (i.e., *just*)? 39 Answers

<p>employer should allow employee to leave in order to catch last bus</p>	<p>adequately fund transit publicly, increase off-peak service hours which we know women, low-income and racialized people who are the base of transit rely on</p>	<p>Affordable housing in areas that need labor</p>
<p>1. improve transportation reliability 2. urban planning should not focus on monocentric</p>	<p>Oblige the employer to assume some part of the transportation costs particularly if scheduling is incompatible with public transport</p>	<p>People's ability to reach destinations should not be dependent on their financial capacity. Also, even through a limiting view of equality of opportunities, the situation is not fair.</p>
<p>Our cities should be set up so that people can get to where they are going by any mode, particularly transit. When we don't do that, we exclude many people from important aspects of life.</p>	<p>Taxi partnership with transit to extend coverage during times when transit doesn't run</p>	<p>Better transit frequency and a schedule adapted to atypical working hours.</p>

Community of Practice responses for making transit deserts in Toronto more fair and just.

Anastasia walked participants through different conceptualizations of standards that have been used by various transportation studies, including equality, utilitarianism, vertical equity, and sufficientarianism. Case studies from the literature review highlighted how these different conceptions of justice have been used by practitioners around the world to inform policies, infrastructure investments, and decision making. For many Community of Practice members, knowing where to even

start when seeking to apply an equity lens is a common barrier. This workshop provided a useful framework for getting started on bringing more equity into transportation initiatives.

WORKSHOP #3 – MOBILITY AS MORE THAN TRANSPORTATION: EXPLORING MOBILITY WITH A HUMAN RIGHTS, ACCESSIBILITY AND GENDER EQUITY LENS (JULY 14)

The third workshop featured presentations from three Community of Practice members: Heather McCain of [Live Educate Transform Society](#) (LETS), Nicole Roach of [Women in Urbanism Canada](#) and Eric Doherty of [Ecopath Planning](#). Presentations focused on the basic tenants of what it means to view mobility through a human rights lens, and how mobility systems intersect with accessibility rights and gender equity. Eric spoke to the human rights issues created by mobility systems that prioritize cars, and how people with disabilities, older adults, and lower income individuals have been found to be disproportionately impacted by bad air quality resulting from vehicle emissions. Heather shared frustration that conversations around accessibility and mobility often focus on access to health care or housing, but rarely discuss the importance of accessible mobility for community events and shared communal celebrations. Heather illustrated how small policy decisions, such as tying fines for fare evasion on public transit to someone’s drivers license, can have a cascading effect on people’s credit score, making it more difficult to secure housing, leading to difficulty maintaining employment, leading to further economic marginalization.

Curb-Cut Effect

Policies and programs **designed to benefit vulnerable groups**, such as people with disabilities, people of colour, and equity-deserving genders, often end up **benefiting all**.

- Equity should not be an afterthought, but a key driver in developing mobility policies and programs

Designing our transportation systems for women, girls, and gender-diverse people **benefits everyone**.

Glover, 2017



Policies and programs designed to benefit equity deserving groups often end up benefiting all.

Nicole provided an overview of women’s mobility, highlighting how traditional transportation planning that focuses on commuting patterns for 9-5 employment is inherently sexist. Women typically take

short, frequent trips at times of the day that do not fit within the standard 9-5 commute. Women are also much more likely to 'trip-chain' (stopping at multiple destinations in one journey). This type of travel pattern is not conducive to car-centric mobility systems that provide poor multi-modal connectivity and infrequent public transit service.

Workshop participants discussed the need to bring these varied lived experiences and testimonials into conversations around transportation planning and infrastructure design. Policies designed to benefit equity-deserving groups often end up benefiting all.

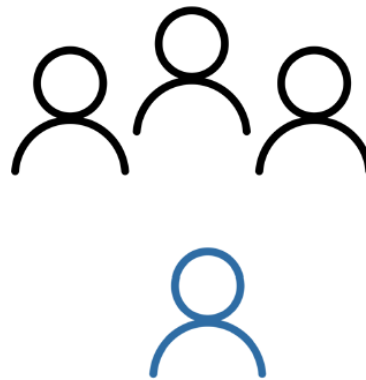
WORKSHOP #4 – TRANSPORT RELATED SOCIAL EXCLUSION: HOW DO SOCIAL DISADVANTAGES AND TRANSPORT POVERTY INTERACT IN CANADA? (SEPTEMBER 15)

September's workshop centred discussion on Transport Related Social Exclusion (TRSE). Mobilizing Justice Researcher Maria Laura Guerrero presented findings on how TRSE and transport poverty affect different populations and regions in Canada, and how these findings can be used to influence public policy and public investment decisions. Maria Laura discussed how many factors contribute to transport poverty, including a lack of options suited to the needs of an individual's abilities, lack of destinations to meet one's daily needs, high costs of transportation, and excessive amounts of time spent travelling. All of these factors contribute to TRSE and lead to missed social and economic opportunities.

What is social exclusion?

- Complex concept that relates to economic and material issues **BUT**
- Encompasses many more aspects: cultural dynamics, time spending, geographic contexts, etc
- An individual is socially excluded if he or she does not participate to a reasonable degree, over time, in certain activities of his or her society,
 - this is for reasons beyond his/her control
 - he or she would like to participate

Burchardt (2000)



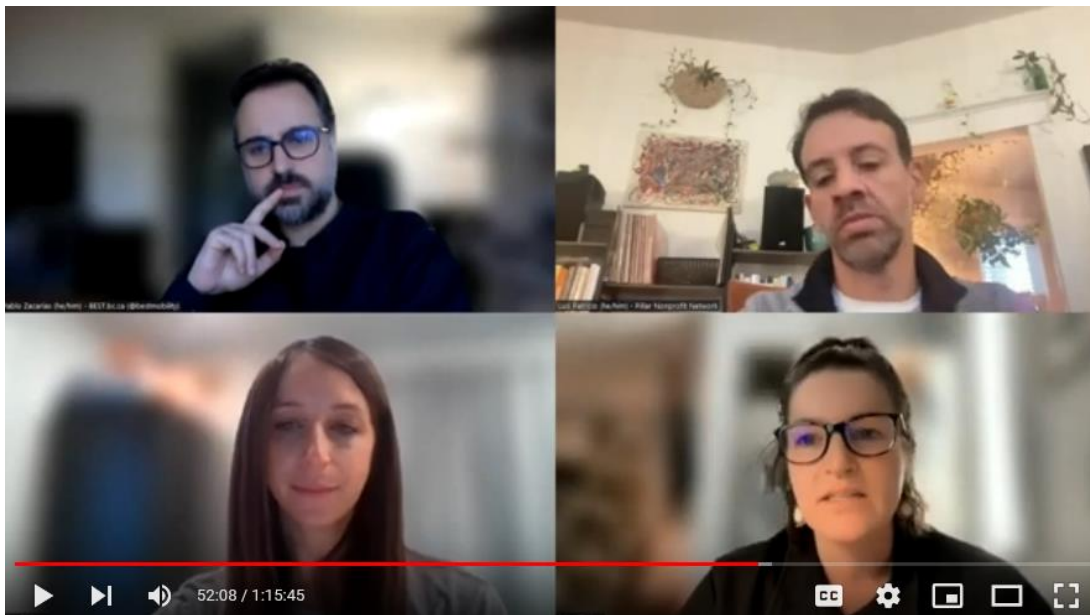
Social exclusion describes the condition of being isolated and unable to participate in economic and cultural activities and opportunities.

Maria Laura’s presentation stressed the importance of looking at the many different dimensions that make up social inclusion, such as consumption, production, and social interaction. She then challenged participants to think about the various ways in which mobility systems make it difficult or impossible for many people to feel socially included. Maria Laura then shared how her research has begun visualizing communities at risk of TRSE by layering maps of cities with key TRSE indicators such as accessibility to healthcare, culture, jobs, and education based on data provided by Statistics Canada.

Maria Laura’s presentation sparked conversation amongst Community of Practice members about how to utilize this data in service delivery, and methods for expanding upon the data provided by Statistics Canada to incorporate lived experiences and other ways of knowing.

WORKSHOP #5 – OPERATIONALIZING EQUITY: HOW ARE MOBILITY PRACTITIONERS INCORPORATING EQUITY INTO THEIR WORK? (NOVEMBER 17)

The fifth and final workshop of 2023 featured a panel discussion of four speakers from community organizations, academia, and government who shared their approaches for operationalizing equity into their work environments and practices. The panel was made up of Jaimy Fischer, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with Mobilizing Justice, Dr. Liraz Fridman, Road Safety Supervision for the City of Guelph, Luis Patricio, Co-Lead of SDG Cities at Pillar Nonprofit Network, and Pablo Zacarias, Executive Director of Better Environmentally Sound Transportation. Pablo and Luis spoke to the importance for NGOs of building a team that reflects the communities you are serve as a key factor in building equitable internal practices.



From the top left, moving clockwise, panelists Pablo Zacarias, Luis Patricio, Jaimy Fischer, and Liraz Fridman.

Liraz shared her approach to developing road safety initiatives in Guelph that proactively use data to identify where equity-deserving communities are being underserved by existing initiatives and infrastructure. Jaimy shared how their work is seeking to bring more equity within data collection. They spoke about reframing the 'data pipeline' to combat biases, and to value different ways of knowing. The panel also explored the concept of 'safe spaces' in working environments. While acknowledging that it's impossible to make spaces completely safe, the panelists shared strategies for making spaces safer, such as working horizontally, understanding organizational and institutional histories, and building an atmosphere where it's encouraged to ask questions and acknowledge mistakes. No two organizations are the same, so what a safer, braver space looks like depends on the characteristics of the institution and the group of people who make up that space.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2023 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Throughout the five 2023 Community of Practice workshops, some recurring themes for future exploration arose from each of our three main participant groups: government civil servants, community organizations, and academic researchers. The following are some of the most commonly identified areas each group would like to dive deeper into, and the barriers they face in bringing more equity into their work and professional environments.

Government Civil Servants & Public Agencies

1. **Case Studies** – Civil servants are eager to get into the nuts and bolts of programs and initiatives that support greater transportation equity. They would like information on how projects are implemented, what key stakeholders are involved, how data is gathered, and what metrics are used to measure success.
2. **Data for Specific Modes of Transport** – Many civil servants work on particular modes of travel, such as cycling, public transit, or zero-emission vehicles. They advised that accessing or sorting through Mobilizing Justice data based on travel mode would be hugely helpful in their work.
3. **Breaking Down Silos** – As with many sectors, civil servants struggle to break down internal silos that prevent governmental departments from coordinating on intersectoral issues, such as transport poverty. Case studies of governments or large organizations that have achieved some success at reducing silo-fication would be of great interest.
4. **Consistent Analytics** – Civil servants are looking for support in developing consistent data and metrics from city to city and region to region, which is one of the main reasons Mobilizing Justice exists.

Community Groups, Advocates, Non-Profits & Charities

1. **Moving From Theory to Implementation** – Many of the charities and non-profits in the Community of Practice have a baseline understanding of equity principles and theories. They are committed to creating more just transportation systems. Community groups that lack the capacity and resources of governments and universities are looking for supports geared to small organizations for putting equity principles into practice.
2. **Sorting Through the Data** – The sheer amount of data available to many community organizations can be overwhelming. This is particularly true for organizations working in urban settings. A user-friendly and easily navigable database of transportation data would help organizations with little extra capacity bolster their work. For organizations working in rural or suburban communities that are not as flush with data, the ability to sort for projects and information geared to those built forms would be useful.
3. **Balancing Needs of Equity-Deserving Groups** – As with civil servants, community organizations would like more information on case studies supporting transportation equity. In particular, projects that have sought to balance the needs of different equity-deserving groups (such as racialized food delivery workers and those with mobility devices) would be beneficial to NGOs that work with multiple equity-deserving communities.

Researchers and Academics

1. **Comprehensive Data Sets** – As with civil servants and NGOs, academic and researchers are in need of comprehensive data sets that are comparable across cities, regions, and provinces. In particular, the need for data on disability and accessibility in transportation is a major need.
2. **Community of Discussion on Equity in Data** – Not many forums allow academics to come together to discuss equity in transportation data in an informal setting. Researchers would be interested in convening regularly to explore successes and failures in practicing data equity, combatting internal biases, and capturing differing ways of knowing in research.
3. **Communicating Findings to Practitioners** – Communicating important findings to practitioners has been a stumbling block for researchers and is one of the key reasons behind the formation of the Community of Practice. Researchers are still looking for support on how to make findings accessible and actionable for those outside the world of academia.

This second year of the Community of Practice provided a lot for us to consider and reflect upon as we move into the next two years. With more data from across the project's various themes and activities, conversations are shifting to how the data can be accessible and applicable to civil servants and grassroots community organizers who can then act upon the research. We look forward to diving deeper and exploring those important questions over the next year.

*David Simor is the Director of The Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT) at Clean Air Partnership. Nancy Smith Lea is a Senior Advisor at The Centre for Active Transportation. TCAT is the Partner Lead on the Mobilizing Justice [Transportation Modes working group](#).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's partnership grant: Mobilizing Justice: towards evidence-based transportation equity policy. Learn more at <http://www.mobilizingjustice.ca>

